

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL
5 September 1984

CENTRAM-PARAMILITARY
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WASHINGTON

The CIA knew a U.S. paramilitary group was sending men to join Nicaraguan rebels but did nothing to stop the volunteers -- two of whom were killed in action in Nicaragua, congressional sources said Wednesday.

The sources said CIA officials Wednesday informed some members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that the agency knew six Americans were traveling to Honduras to join the CIA-backed Nicaraguan Democratic Force, which is fighting against the leftist Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

"The agency heard these guys were coming and their guys dove into fox holes," a source familiar with intelligence matters said.

CIA officials said agents in Honduras "got out of the way" of the six Americans because they "didn't want anybody to think (they) were involved" in the paramilitary operation, the source said.

At the same time, Rep. Ted Weiss, D-N.Y., sent a letter to CIA Director William Casey, calling on him to explain if his agency had any connection with the two dead Americans.

"The loss of American lives in the covert war against Nicaragua could draw the United States into direct military involvement in that conflict," Weiss said.

The Americans, described by U.S. officials as "volunteers," were sent to Honduras by Civilian-Military Assistance, a paramilitary organization based in Decatur, Ala.

Two members of the group, Huntsville police detective Dana H. Parker and James P. Powell III, were killed in a rebel helicopter shot down by Nicaraguan forces. The helicopter was downed after participating in a Nicaraguan Democratic Force attack on a Sandinista military school at Santa Clara.

Nicaragua charged that Parker, Powell and the four other Americans who went to Honduras a week before the attack were mercenaries working for the CIA.

Tom Posey, a founder of CMA who organized the trip, told UPI the group has sent anti-Sandinista "contra" rebels \$70,000 worth of equipment and at least 15 Americans as trainers since January.

The sources said they were uncertain how far in advance intelligence agents in Honduras knew of the Posey group's operation and the planned Santa Clara attack.

The Pentagon said U.S. military personnel do not control two Honduran airfields Nicaragua says were used in the rebel attack in which Parker and Powell were killed and that U.S. personnel were not on hand when the attack was launched.

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